



August 2022

Namoi What We Heard Report Aboriginal Cultural Snapshot



Our vision for the Namoi Regional Water Strategy is to support the delivery of healthy, reliable and resilient water resources for a liveable and prosperous region. To achieve this, we need to position the region so there is the right amount of water of the right quality available to people, Aboriginal communities, towns, industries and the environment.

Overview

One of the objectives of the regional water strategies is to recognise and protect Aboriginal Water rights, interests, and access to water.

Aboriginal community consultation workshops were held throughout the state in 12 regional areas of NSW. Workshops were delivered with independent regional Aboriginal Community Facilitators working in collaboration with the Department of Planning and Environment - Water, Regional Water Strategies.

Information provided within this snapshot describes all feedback received from Aboriginal community workshops held within the Namoi regional locations of Narrabri, Wee Waa, Walgett and Walhallow.

Aboriginal Engagement Approach

There was strong support for improving the recognition of First Nations/Aboriginal People's water rights, interests and access to water for the Namoi region. The need to protect and maintain healthy waterways and ecosystems was important for many stakeholders.

The consultation and engagement program for the draft strategy highlighted a wide variety of views on a range of themes:

- Aboriginal Knowledge & Cultural Heritage
- Water Security
- Environmental & Ecosystem Health
- Climate change & data modelling
- Groundwater
- New and existing water infrastructure
- Entitlement reliability and risk management

Key Support

Highlighted below are key support points recognised through the consultations with Aboriginal communities.

- Support for initiatives that helped build the capacity of First Nations / Aboriginal communities to participate in decision-making or play an active role in water management.
- Support for empowering First Nations / Aboriginal communities to be part of managing and governing water through employment opportunities.
- Support for a greater uptake of Aboriginal Cultural Water Access Licences, including the ability to improve environmental and cultural outcomes.

Next Steps

Key support focus areas from all consultations with the Aboriginal communities of the Namoi have been incorporated into the priority actions of the draft Namoi Strategy. Regional Water Strategies will continue Aboriginal Engagement Consultation during 2022 to finalise the strategy.

Key Concerns

- Key Concerns were also identified by the community. Investigate additional options providing culturally appropriate employment that delivers cultural and environmental outcomes.
- First Nations / Aboriginal rights, interests and access should be interwoven throughout the strategy and given greater focus, with existing options strengthened and prioritised.
- There were specific suggestions regarding language and style associated with the way in which First Nations / Aboriginal people are represented in the document.
- Cultural values and ecological knowledge could inform environmental

water managers, river operators and water policy makers to better protect First Nations / Aboriginal rights, access and interests.

- New water licenses for First Nations / Aboriginal people could threaten the integrity of existing licenses and compete with current general security licenses.
- Increased First Nations / Aboriginal representation should be balanced with the input of all other stakeholders.
- The need for genuine and collaborative information-sharing to improve understanding and incorporation of cultural knowledge in water management.
- Early, direct and on-Country consultation with local First Nations / Aboriginal communities to understand and appropriately incorporate cultural values into water management.
- A long-term approach to improve engagement and build stronger relationships, acknowledging the diversity of First Nations / Aboriginal communities within NSW.
- Concern that First Nations / Aboriginal communities do not have equal access and rights to water when compared with other users.
- Over-extraction from river systems, including through floodplain harvesting, is having a long-term detrimental impact on cultural sites, areas used for hunting and recreation and spawning sites.
- The importance for First Nations / Aboriginal people to maintain physical access to the river, especially given competing rights of landholders and Councils.

Long List of Options NUMS 46-56: Improving the recognition of Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water

Options to protect and strengthen cultural landscapes, practices, knowledge and traditions, as well as to support empowerment, self-determination and economic advancement of First Nations/Aboriginal People and communities, were well supported in the feedback.

Options	Summary of feedback received
46. Integrating Aboriginal knowledge into groundwater decision making	Improve the acknowledgement of cultural values, protect culturally significant sites and support cultural connection to water-sustained environments (such as Options 46 and 50).
47. Culturally appropriate water knowledge program	Compensate First Nations / Aboriginal people for lack of water ownership or control (Options 47, 48, 49, 53 and 55).
48. Water-dependent cultural practice and site identification project	Incorporate traditional First Nations / Aboriginal ecological knowledge into water management action plans for the environment (such as Option 50).
49. Secure flow for water dependant on Cultral sites.	Assist in engaging Aboriginal / First Nations people through initiatives such as the Regional Cultural Water Officer employment program (Option 51) and establishing a regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee (Option 52). In addition, there was a call for First Nations / Aboriginal representation on any future Namoi / Peel Environmental Water Advisory Group, and a desire to strengthen First Nations / Aboriginal peoples' participation in water-related employment, and water management generally.
50. Shared benefit project (environment and cultural outcomes).	Improve connection to Country (Option 54), which could also enhance First Nations / Aboriginal peoples' ability to influence river management and facilitate improvements in river health.
51. Regional cultural water officer employment program	Enable First Nations / Aboriginal communities to directly manage water (Option 55).
52. Regional Aboriginal Water Advisory Committee	Some stakeholders drew attention to the economic impacts of cultural options, stating:
53. Water allocations for Aboriginal Communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was important to distinguish between cultural and economic purposes when developing water entitlement arrangements. • Existing licences should be maintained and no new licences should be issued that would directly compete with current general security licences. • Some 'cultural' options were seen to be redundant. • A desire to investigate additional options for broader social and economic development by providing culturally appropriate employment that also delivered cultural and environmental outcomes.
54. Co-management investigation of Travelling Stock Reserves	In addition, stakeholders made specific suggestions regarding the way in which First Nations / Aboriginal people are represented in the document. This was viewed as significant to the way in which they and their role in the strategy's implementation are perceived and understood. It was suggested that Aboriginal rights, interest and access should be interwoven throughout the strategy and especially where options have dual objectives. Specific recommendations included:
55. Aboriginal cultural water access licences review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include details of the Gomeroi Native Title Application and the specific associated rights claimed by the Gomeroi People. • Consider aligning cultural options with other options in the strategy which directly or indirectly impact on Aboriginal water.
56. River Ranger Program	

Response to Feedback

Since the publication of the first draft Namoi Regional Water Strategy, the NSW Water Strategy has been further developed.

Some of the issues that the first draft Namoi Regional Water Strategy highlighted and that were raised by communities in the Namoi region are challenges across the whole state.

These state-wide issues have been included as priority focus areas in the NSW Water Strategy. Your feedback has been used to refine the key challenges that we need to focus on in the final Namoi Regional Water Strategy, and the options that will be shortlisted for further investigation.

Further Consultation

We have heard feedback from across the state requesting more consultation on the regional water strategies, and a greater say in how options are shortlisted and prioritised.

The department remains committed to engaging with First Nations/Aboriginal People in the region as we progress through the options assessment process, and the development of the final Namoi Regional Water Strategy and the NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Unlike many other challenges in the region, the fundamental water rights of First Nations/Aboriginal People is still a major gap in water management across NSW.

Addressing this issue will set up a framework for addressing the Aboriginal community options identified in the draft regional water strategies. These options will be progressed through a NSW Aboriginal Water Strategy.

Opportunities to progress region-specific options for Aboriginal communities, in parallel

with this state-level action, will be explored in the final Namoi Regional Water Strategy.

We will be undertaking public consultation on a shortlist of actions before the Namoi Regional Water Strategy is finalised.

Further Information

For more information regarding Aboriginal Communities & Water please see the DPIE Water webpage

[Engaging with Aboriginal Communities¹](#)

For any questions related to your regional water strategy and a copy of the What We Heard Reports please use link below

[Regional Public Exhibition²](#)

For any other enquiries please email regionalwater.strategies@dpi.e.nsw.gov.au

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¹ <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>

² <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/water/plans-programs/regional-water-strategies/objectives-principles>